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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5300
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002055

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958:N/A
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: TWO U.S. SERVICEMEMBERS KILLED IN ROADSIDE
EXPLOSION ON JOLO ISLAND

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Two U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) servicemembers on the island of Jolo were killed in a roadside explosion on the morning of September 29 as they traveled in an armored vehicle with Philippine military personnel to support humanitarian projects. Following receipt of this tragic news, FBI's Legal Attache office and NCIS dispatched teams to assist in the investigation. Early available reports indicate that the explosion was caused by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), and it is unclear whether the explosion was specifically directed at U.S. forces, who are not allowed by the Philippine Constitution to engage in combat operations. No group has claimed responsibility for this attack, although the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group and other criminal groups are known to operate on the island. The attack comes two weeks after unidentified assailants conducted a non-fatal ambush against an AFP and U.S. supply convoy at the Jolo City pier. Names of the two U.S. personnel killed are being withheld pending notification of the next of kin. Philippine Secretary of National Defense Teodoro called the Ambassador to convey condolences at the loss of American life. END SUMMARY

EXPLOSION KILLS TWO U.S. SERVICEMEMBERS

¶2. (SBU) A roadside explosion at approximately 0900 local time September 29 killed one U.S. servicemember and fatally injured a second. The JSOTF-P personnel were transporting Philippine military personnel in a JSOTF-P armored vehicle between two humanitarian assistance sites, one of which was a school. The explosion south of the village of Batong near Jolo City also killed one Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) servicemember and severely injured two others. Early JSOTF-P reports indicate that an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), which appeared to be placed outside the school gates, caused the explosion. It is unclear if U.S. forces were the specific target of the attack. Names of the two U.S. personnel killed are being withheld pending notification of the next of kin.

MISSION SENDS TEAMS TO INVESTIGATE

¶3. (SBU) Following news of the fatal attack, FBI's Legal Attache office and NCIS dispatched teams to assist in the investigation. JSOTF-P also dispatched personnel to coordinate with the AFP. Embassy sections are continuing to track all available information on this attack. The Mission will provide updates of the ongoing investigations and report septel any new developments.

A RARE ATTACK ON U.S. FORCES

14. (SBU) While attacks against the Philippine military and civilians are common on Jolo, this IED attack is the first fatal attack against U.S. personnel since a 2002 bombing in Zamboanga that claimed the life of a U.S. servicemember. No group has thus far claimed responsibility. The terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and other criminal groups that oppose the Philippine military presence on Jolo are known to operate on the island, often with the support of the local population. This attack follows a September 14 attack by unidentified assailants against an AFP and U.S. resupply convoy at the Jolo City pier, and comes at a time of heightened Philippine military activity against the ASG, which has continued to kidnap and kill civilians throughout the year. Philippine military operations against ASG rebels culminated in a successful but controversial September 21 operation on the last two days of Ramadan, which effectively wiped out a portion of the ASG stronghold on Jolo.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) This tragic killing of U.S. personnel involved in one of many ongoing humanitarian projects on Jolo island could hasten a Philippine government review of the U.S.-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement, which the Philippine Senate recently urged the government to

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renegotiate. Even as the Filipino people and the Philippine military praise the U.S. government's contributions in the wake of a devastating tropical storm that submerged large swaths of the country, some politicians opposed to the U.S. presence in the Philippines -- and those seeking to score political points in advance of the May 2010 general elections -- may nonetheless attempt to use this tragedy to bolster their arguments for renegotiating the existing framework of U.S.-Philippines bilateral military cooperation. Post will continue to monitor the situation on the island of Jolo and will report septel about any initial developments in the investigations, as well as Philippine government reaction to the attack.

KENNEY